*Article*

Cultural Dynamics

Cultural Dynamics
2016, Vol. 28(3) 249–265

DOI: 10.1177/0921374016668544
journals.sagepub.com/home/cdy
SAGE

# Caribbean curatorial agencies: *A Cultural Object*'s unruliness and its affective aftermaths

**Carlos Garrido Castellano**
Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

**Abstract**
This essay analyzes *A Cultural Object*, an installation made by the Jamaican artist Dawn Scott in 1985, in order to discuss how institutional practices and criticism are framed in contemporary Caribbean art. Through an examination of *A Cultural Object*'s afterlife in the space of the National Gallery of Jamaica, I attempt to examine the relation between the agencies of the museum, the artist, the spectators, and the installation. In so doing, the text intends to reconsider the potential of unpredictable human and nonhuman relations within Caribbean institutional and cultural spaces.

**Keywords**
art institutions, Caribbean art, curatorship, Jamaica, spectatorship

In attempting to acknowledge the imprecision and vagueness of the notion of criticism, Raymond Williams (1983: 84) urged for a kind of activity surpassing the limitations of "fault-finding." In *Keywords*, Williams tracks the historical origin of the word, explaining how the concept became associated with negativity. Challenging this tradition, Williams sets aside his etymological analysis in order to propose a redefinition of the concept. For Williams, criticism is defined as a practice attentive not only to continuous self-revision but also to the need for sketching alternative materializations of customs, agencies, and affections in response to specific spatial–temporal coordinates. Williams (1983) urges for a transformative initiative, directly embedded within its cultural context and therefore not directly translatable to other contexts (p. 86). This advice cannot be of more relevance in a moment when the links between art and labor, institutional dynamics, instituent practices, and cultural activism are being intensely rethought.

**Corresponding author:**
Carlos Garrido Castellano, Centro de Estudos Comparatistas, Universidade de Lisboa, Alameda da Universidade, 1600-214 Lisbon, Portugal.
Email: cgc@campus.ul.pt

Borrowing from these debates and adopting Williams' active, situated notion of criticism, this article examines some of the ghostly presences and pitfalls in Caribbean critical and curatorial practices and the thinking surrounding them. My main concern is with challenging the primacy of discourse in the configuration of national and regional histories and understandings of artistic practice. In order to question that tendency, I will suggest that there is much to be learned from spectatorship and from artworks themselves. I will analyze *A Cultural Object*, the installation that the Jamaican artist Dawn Scott created in 1985 for the celebrated exhibition *Six Options: Gallery Space Revisited*, which took place at the National Gallery of Jamaica. Scott's project consisted of a complex labyrinth formed by zinc sheets and labeled "A Cultural Zone." The labyrinth's walls were covered with a disjointed mixture of street culture paraphernalia referring to religion, dancehall, consumer culture, and garrison politics,[1] centering on a derelict scenario presided over by the supine body of a homeless person. *A Cultural Object* is said to have translated the atmosphere of Kingston streets within the space of the museum (Poupeye, 1985), sharing the realism and pessimism of the 1980s, which followed the socialist government of Michael Manley.[2] From this standpoint, the project's main asset is based on the shock it provokes in the "uptown" visitor of the National Gallery.[3] However, I will argue that Scott's installation is somehow subjected to a contradictory valence: on one hand, it constitutes a cornerstone in the process of introducing popular culture within the Jamaican national canon. On the other hand, it emerges as a gesture orchestrated by the very institution it sought to criticize.

*A Cultural Object* arose from a very particular context and temporality. However, as it also poses poignant and timely questions to our understanding of creative agency and institutionalism in the present. Since its creation, the installation became a popular referent, attracting the attention of several generations and developing a sort of afterlife. As we will see, this afterlife is far from being unproblematic. In this article, I maintain that there is an "unruly" potential in Scott's installation. This potential relates its capacity of fleeing institutional normality and demanding alternative emotional responses. The "unruliness" of *A Cultural Object* emerges as an uncomfortable and eloquent witness to the Caribbean art world's elitism and the continuity of social and racial privileges within Caribbean postcolonial institutional life; however it also, as I will attempt to demonstrate, marks a lucid path forward.

*A Cultural Object* speaks eloquently not only about the particular issues it deals with, the "high and low culture" debates, and the institutional politics in Jamaica. There is something that refuses thematization and categorization, some "out-of-jointness" in *A Cultural Object*, and that element, I suggest, goes beyond (without dismissing it) the potentiality of the work in defying and expanding the postcolonial Jamaican national canon, enabling a critique that stands close to Williams' aspirations. Scott's installation bears important insights on how culture is created, exhibited, and consumed. It also reveals the potentiality of criticism to unsettle normative configurations and propose alternative ones while questioning their own reach. The installation also helps us to move forward from the "pro-con" debates on institutional privilege that have permeated Jamaican postcolonial art criticism. The (lack of) inclusivity of the Jamaican national canon and of art politics and the exclusion of vernacular practices, on one hand, and the insertion of any artistic discourse within an all-encompassing nationalist discourse, on the other, have served as a central focus for the debates that arose in the last decades of

the twentieth century (Douglas, 2004; the main positions of those debates are expressed in Archer-Straw and Poupeye, 1995; Boxer and Poupeye, 1982, 1998; Paul, 1998, 1999, 2003b, 2009; Poupeye, 1998, 2007). Although engaging with them, *A Cultural Object* is not (merely) about inserting the vernacular inside the museum. It is (also) about what remains outside the curatorial process and the institutional space. If objects and images have an afterlife and can be conceptualized as "wanting" beings (Mitchell, 2005), so do exhibitions. In many cases, those desires transcend their creators' will. In exploring *A Cultural Object* and its curatorial aftermath,[4] I intend to foreground various elements related to issues of artistic institutionalism, institutional displays, institutional critique and the fortunes of curatorial initiatives, which are partially dismissed or ignored in Caribbean curatorial practice and thought.

Some questions arise. Why does *A Cultural Object*—one of the most acclaimed and popular symbols of the dynamism of Jamaican vernacular culture and the "vernacularization" of the national museum—contain a dying body at its very core?[5] What does this body tell us? What does it want from us? In trying to answer some of those questions, in the next sections, I will analyze three aspects of *A Cultural Object*: how the installation engages with curatorial and institutional agency,[6] what kind of affects and responses it provokes within the museum space, and how its aftermath is linked to heterogeneous—and not exclusively human[7]—agencies.

## *A Cultural Object*

Before creating *A Cultural Object*, Dawn Scott was primarily known for her figurative batiks, although she had also produced sculpture, painting, and clothing, and designed theater sets (Conrads, 2000: 56). Her intervention at the National Gallery was, indeed, Scott's first and only installation. *A Cultural Object* occupied an entire room at the National Gallery. Its labyrinthine structure forced a partial, incomplete, and gradual perception. At the entrance of the zinc spiral, we find a message stating, "Cultural Zone. Enter at your own risk," which echoes the garrison politics of the period (Poupeye, 2009a). Despite this warning, the entrance is the most "playful" and "inviting" part of the installation, as it is decorated with found posters advertising music events and references to dancehall and popular culture. The entrance gives way to a "darker" scenario as we face a narrow, dirty corridor, where advertisements of everyday consumer products and allusions to religion, politics, sexuality, and education share the representational space. This part is not only crowded with messages; these become more explicit and acquire a more ominous tone, with references ranging from the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and Edward Seaga, to sexist attitudes toward the female body, and so on. The quantity of debris increases as we arrive to the center of the spiral, where the body of a dying homeless man lies sprawled across the floor. Before reaching this climax, two adjacently situated messages merit our attention: the first one says, "Devon House,"[8] and the second one states, "Jimmy Leave in Space." "Jimmy" is the name of the clay figure of a homeless person sculpted by Scott. Based on a model in her studio, the appearance of the carved figure aims to be as realistic as possible. This realism, essential for the shock value the installations aim to elicit, is the result of meticulous documentation of Kingston's ghetto spaces (Poupeye, 1985: 7) (Image 1, Courtesy of the National Gallery of Jamaica).

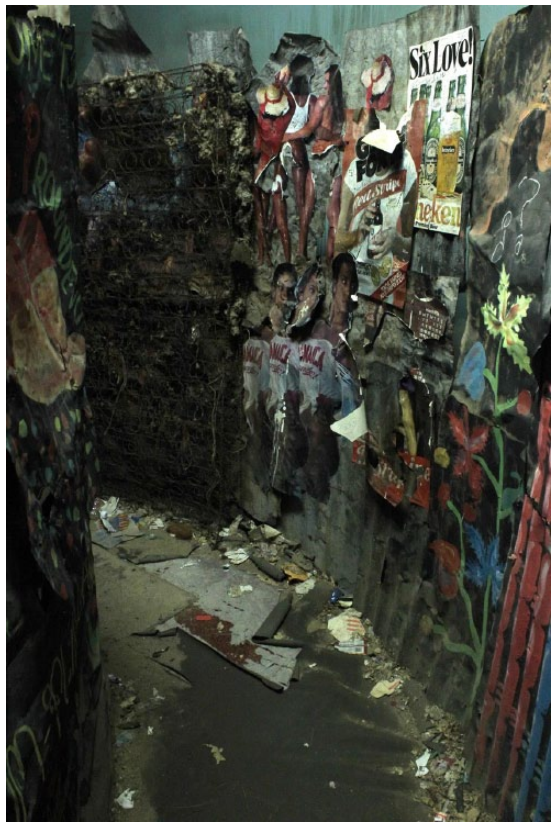


**Image 1.** Dawn Scott. *A Cultural Object.*


**Image 2.** Dawn Scott. *A Cultural Object.*


**Image 3.** Dawn Scott. *A Cultural Object.*


**Image 4.** Dawn Scott. *A Cultural Object.*

It was precisely this verisimilitude, along with the bitter tone with which it was applied to Jamaican everyday reality and translated into the elitist space of the (national) white cube, which rendered *A Cultural Object* unique within the exhibition in which it was integrated and which inevitably made it a popular referent within Jamaican and Caribbean art. Scott's installation was by far the most adventurous and dynamic work produced within *Six Options: Gallery Transformed*, one of the main exhibitions organized by the National Gallery of Jamaica in the 1980s. *Six Options* arose at a time when Jamaican art was being redefined. Although the term "institutional critique" does not appear in any analysis of the show, it was clear that the exhibition aimed for a challenge to the representational and discursive scope of the National Gallery. In *Six Options*, curator Rosalind Smith McCrea was asked to commission six installations (four by Jamaican


**Image 5.** Dawn Scott. *A Cultural Object.*

artists: Colin Garland, Laura Facey, David Boxer, and Dawn Scott and two by American artists: Joyce Scott and Sam Gilliam) to be situated in different spaces of the National Gallery. *Six Options* somehow constituted one side of the coin of the other central show of Jamaican art developed in the 1980s: *Jamaican Art: 1922–1982*, an exhibition curated by David Boxer and organized by the National Gallery of Jamaica and the Smithsonian, which served as a major survey of modern and contemporary Jamaican art exhibited abroad and which has become "a standard resource for Jamaica's art history from 1922 to 1997" (Douglas, 2004: 52).

## *A Cultural Object* and the Caribbean curatorial

In a frequently quoted interview, Annie Paul defined the position of Christopher Cozier, a central figure in contemporary Trinidadian art and one of the leading actors in the country's artistic modernization, as that of an *Alter Native*: "Chris talks of feeling 'storyless' and 'mythless.' The alter natives are natives without narratives, or perhaps those with unpopular narratives" (Paul, 2003a). The characterization of Caribbean artists as "natives

without narratives" forms part of a major pitfall of Caribbean criticism and the presence of a certain negativity in the consideration of artistic agency, ultimately engaged in the task of "fault-finding." A focus on imaging and imagination has prevailed in the most recent criticism. In trying to contest the inheritance of the colonial gaze within the picturesque imaginaries (Thompson, 2006), the politics and times of reception of Caribbean visuality (Wainwright, 2011, 2012, 2013), and the commoditization of racial and sexual difference within and beyond the region (Kempadoo, 2013; Mohammed, 2011; Stephens, 2013), a strong emphasis has been placed on exploring and categorizing the counter-narratives elaborated by Caribbean artists. This literature intends to "reorient thoughts, ideas, knowledge, and creativity as emergent and embedded in Caribbean visual sensibility" (Kempadoo, 2013: 152). However, it is clear that this task seems unrealizable without paying attention to how this visual sensibility engages with the institutional frameworks determining its production and display. Looking back at the example opening this section, Cozier's activity is highly concerned with instituting platforms that could be used to improve significant aspects of the cultural milieu. Cozier was responsible for the creation of two pivotal artist-managed spaces in Port of Spain, CCA7 (2000–2005) and Alice Yard (2006–ongoing), which have been essential in fostering a climate of discussion and exchange, in promoting the work of young Trinidadian artists, and in establishing links with similar initiatives across the Caribbean. This side of Cozier's activity stands for the potential of artistic practice—effectively, not only discursively—for instituting new visual tropes and, more than that, a noncommoditized, expanded terrain for Caribbean artistic practice.

*A Cultural Object* is especially eloquent in this regard. It is neither silent nor does it relate to an unpopular narrative. The installation triggers a multisensory set of elements that "have a life on their own" within the regulated space of the National Gallery, demanding particular responses by the audience's side. The museum here emerges as open to conflict and negotiation, destabilizing the relationship between cultural spaces, nationalist agendas, and institutional power. Scott's installation also evidences the need to address the critique of curatorial projects from a position that is attentive to the articulation of "active and complex relations" taking place in uncanny, unruly, uncontrolled ways in a sort of curatorial aftermath. In this section, I argue that both premises—the enactment of multiple, sometimes conflicting agencies within curatorial practice and the afterlife of those beyond the exhibitional moment—present in *A Cultural Object* enable an alternative, more comprehensive approach to Caribbean institutional and curatorial histories.[9]

Scott's installation shows how the afterlife of curatorial initiatives and the disputes over institutional space can be eloquent in the ways in which established and alternative configurations and practices of institutional life, cultural criticism, and visual commoditization are defined and materialized. My intention is not so much to posit *A Cultural Object* as an example of the specialized activity referred to as curating. Rather, I intend to show the potentiality of thinking "through" exhibitions and institutional practices[10] and the related multifarious set of pressing issues concerning Caribbean societies and cultures at large. Although *A Cultural Object* "captured" the logic of the museum and the curatorial discourse that originated it, the installation, nevertheless, revealed itself to be particularly resistant to straightforward thematic categorizations. It is striking how the

exhibition's innovative potential was soon appropriated by a nationalistic agenda in the official, institutional discourse. Veerle Poupeye (1985), then working at the Department of Education of the National Gallery, justified the originality of the exhibition as follows:

> On my first visit to the National Gallery one thing was immediately apparent: experimentation, formal experimentation especially, was rather subdued in Jamaican art. Only recently have some Jamaican artists started looking beyond the limits of representation and the traditional media. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that Jamaican twentieth century art has been playing a crucial role in the growth of a national cultural consciousness. Art served (and still serves) a specific purpose in this society. (p. 4)

This has to be understood as part of the process of defending the role of cultural institutions in the configuration of a postcolonial Jamaican national identity.[11] From this particular standpoint, the exhibition is "deactivated" and incorporated into the national art canon as another expression of Jamaicanness. "National cultural consciousness" here aims to stand for the entire society, with the institution being simultaneously the object and the subject of criticism. In the next section, I will explore how the installation's afterlife resists its integration within any stable, univocal categorization.

## Effects and affects

In a short text about institutional practices, Gilles Deleuze conceived of institutions as organized systems of mediums that can be employed to satisfy particular demands through action. For him, institutions are the main platform for affirmative action, to the degree of affirming that "men have no instincts, they produce institutions" (Deleuze, 2002: 27).[12] He states,

> The theory of the institution places the negative outside of the social (needs) in order to present society as essentially positive, inventive (original means of satisfaction). One such theory would offer us political criteria: tyranny is a regime where there are many laws and few institutions; democracy, a regime where there are many institutions, few laws. (Deleuze, 2002: 25)[13]

The distinction between institutions and instincts, as well as the potential of the former in configuring communities of affect, is made particularly evident by *A Cultural Object*'s afterlife. The popularity of the installation is quite eloquent about how it channels an affective relationship with the surrounding institutional space, one that can imply the reproduction of externally imposed and commoditized social values, while also envisaging affirmative creative acts. The memories linked to *A Cultural Object* are quite eloquent in this regard.[14] Scott's project was perceived as different from the rest of the installations comprising *Six Options.* In Scott's project, a number of unconventional dynamics were put into play. Yet, what the installation actually intends is one thing. Quite another thing altogether is how it was, and is, perceived by the different subjects portrayed in the work or those participating curatorially or institutionally. The critical value of curatorial activity unfolds as thinking is materialized through our doing,[15] as

praxis (Smith, 2012: 38). That doing, however, is not limited to the temporality of the exhibition, nor to the curator's agency. This praxis always escapes—at least partially—curatorial and institutional will, thus being open to unpredictable effects and affects. The "unexpected" reactions to our installation are part of that process.

In her analysis of the installation, Veerle Poupeye (2009a) categorized Scott's work as "an instructive crack in the institutional armor of the NGJ." Earlier in the same entry, she described the success of the installation among the Jamaican public as follows:

> While A Cultural Object obviously resonates with Jamaican audiences, the public response has always had a sensationalist, anarchic edge. Visitors almost immediately started adding their own graffiti to the walls and while the artist initially accepted this de facto interactivity, the results have been unexpected and often disturbing. Most of the graffiti are simply juvenile—of the "Kilroy was here" variety—but many others are obscene or politically partisan and illustrate exactly those cultural attitudes Scott sought to critique. Even the "street person" sculpture has been vandalized—one of its legs was broken, which sadly mimics the abuse street people sometimes encounter in Jamaica—and the at times unpleasant smell illustrates that some even urinate inside the installation. (Poupeye, 2009a)

Poupeye's valorization of the installation highlights the interactive side of the project, mentioning the spontaneous responses to it, as well as the tolerant and embracing attitude of the institution. The installation is taken as a pedagogical device, one that aimed to challenge the perception of the museum as an immaculate white cube. Nevertheless, the effects and affects motivated by the installation are not the desired ones: in her appreciation, they appear as an obscene supplement, a "disturbing" presence that betrays Scott's "effective" act of criticism. Within this framework, *A Cultural Object* emerges as (national) heritage, and the responses to it as excessive, uncompressible acts.[16] While her text is highly emotional, as she locates the responses to the installation in an arch ranging from "sensationalist" and "anarchic" to "disturbing," its conclusion is a rational condemnation of vandalism. It is as if that condemnation somehow relegated the feelings arising from the artistic experience to a secondary position, implying therefore a closure of the "instructive crack" in the institution posed by Scott's project. In any case, Poupeye acknowledges the emotional potential of the installation: although "wrong," the attacks to the figure, the act of urinating within the work, and the graffiti are spontaneous, "anarchist" responses sanctioned by the artist—and we have to add: tolerated by the institution—only a posteriori.

The fact that *A Cultural Object* is an example of curating that links to emotions and affects also follows from Dawn Scott's statement on the project. In trying to deal with the "interactivity" of the installation, Scott pointed out how *A Cultural Object*'s space conjures

> some of our favorite national obsessions mainly as projected in the media, a psychological condition in which we are obliged to live, especially our poorest and most vulnerable, and the resulting way in which people see and project themselves, mainly through graffiti. (National Gallery of Jamaica, 2010).

Contrary to Poupeye's interpretation, here, the focus has passed from the criticism of excessive responses to the installation and the difficulties of dealing with them

institutionally, to the conceptualization of the artwork as a mechanism that captures "national obsessions." Rather than trying to limit or to represent those obsessions, excess operates in Scott's view by making evident those obsessions and incarnating them within the whole process of experiencing the project. It is interesting how the artist's interpretation does not acknowledge any privileged or previously configured viewpoint: on the contrary, the installation operates as a mechanism that transmits a specific mood (an unpleasant, uncanny mood) to multiple sets of individuals, making them experience it *but also demanding a response* to it (thus her stress on "the way in which people see and *project* themselves" (our emphasis)). Affects here are a normal, expected response, whereas the effects associated with them constitute a demanded updating of the project.

The consequences of this analysis are worth exploring. In Scott's approach to her own installation, madness is not only "a psychological condition," personalized by the agonizing figure of Jimmy. Rather, it is a condition motivated by the failure of national political and social agendas (we must not forget that the installation was created during a time of deteriorating utopian aspirations, after the fall of the Manley government and the failure of the Grenada Revolution). In Scott's view, madness is not an excessive figure, but the normative structure of a post-utopian, postcolonial present (see Baker Joseph, 2013). While not focusing solely on political issues, *A Cultural Object* captures the passing of utopian agendas and locates them within the already "captured" space of the museum. This is not to be seen in an all-inclusive, simplistic vein, of the "we are all Jimmy" sort. Rather, by generalizing an uncanny condition among the audience, Scott disrupts the identification of the institution with national culture and its capacity to establish the norm and to canonize art historical discourses. Moreover, the installation makes explicit the constraints limiting any critical response to institutional and social exclusivity and deprivation. Unlike any other space in the National Gallery of Jamaica, the gallery where *A Cultural Object* is displayed "demands" a very specific kind of act, one emerging from a feeling of "anger and alienation" which Kelly Baker Joseph identifies with madness but which we can also relate to institutional privilege. Seen from this viewpoint, *A Cultural Object* clearly transcends interpretations that are based on the inscription of popular culture within the "high" space of the museum.

However, there is something missing here. What about (past and contemporary) audience perceptions of the installation's effects and affects? As usual, we do not know very much about these aspects. Yet, there are some clues that may enable us to reconstruct a third narrative based on the audience and the installation's own agency.

## Inanimate unruliness

This section will focus on examining how the "inanimate" agency of the installation arises as the main carrier of its unruly, emancipatory potential. The two main actors remained outside the final section: the installation's audience and the installation itself. Let us begin by considering the viewers. The comments collected in the entries on Dawn Scott and *A Cultural Object* posted on the National Gallery of Jamaica Blog are mostly appraisals of the artist and celebrations of the project's sharply drawn topicality, in addition to heartfelt and sincere remembrances of Scott as a person and an artist. We also have quantitative data evidencing that *A Cultural Object* is one of the most visited and

most commented-upon artworks in the Gallery.[17] It is, then, a popular space and that popularity somehow seems to confirm Scott's intention. Finally, the third element we know is that popularity has led to spontaneous, sometimes violent interventions in the installation. The vandalism that we find condemned in Poupeye's text is the most extreme evidence of the installation's success. Is there another way of approaching this phenomenon?

One of the first things that comes to mind is that these acts do not take place in any other place within the National Gallery. Scott's installation is thus somehow gifted with a more intense dynamism than the rest of the museum space. This dynamism implies a continuous revisiting and reexperiencing of the project, one that also materializes in unruly, undesired ways. The different actions that have affected *A Cultural Object* contrast with the sense of decay and destitution suggested by the figure of Jimmy and the environment it inhabits. There are, then, two forces in dispute here: the one that holds the installation (physically, epistemologically, and institutionally) in its place, as it is, such as a frozen presence, and the one that dynamically updates, transforms, enlivens, and rejuvenates it. *A Cultural Object*'s afterlife is the space where these two forces exist in dispute. The audience's interventions should not be seen as merely decorative or loutish: they compromise the installation's indexicality, setting up new meanings and bringing to the present the curatorial and institutional challenge the project meant to pose in 1985. From this third viewpoint, institutional tolerance and Scott's agreement to the installation to be altered are anecdotal in comparison with the affects that the installation itself has galvanized over a period of 30 years. If *A Cultural Object* has maintained its fertility for decades, another kind of agency must be in play here. What if we ask the installation itself?

The struggle over the installation's afterlife implies its animation. To say that artworks have a life beyond an artist's intentions, and that something similar occurs with images, objects, and things,[18] is a commonplace. Yet sometimes, we tend to forget or ignore commonplaces. Hito Steyerl (2010) conceives of things as a fossilized conundrum of forces:

> A thing is never just an object, but a fossil in which a constellation of forces are petrified. Things are never just inert objects, passive items, or lifeless shucks, but consist of tensions, forces, hidden powers, all being constantly exchanged.

In her view, these forces constitute a continuum, yet one in which not all the elements or positions are always evident. Things are then active elements that, when properly illuminated, enact their own agency.

This is the case with our labyrinth. If we seriously consider this position, and take *A Cultural Object* as "a fossil in which a constellation of forces are petrified," new approaches to Scott's artwork unfold. I will focus on exploring two of these approaches: how the materiality of the installation promotes new understandings of the institutional logic that haunts the stability of the museum space and how it generates a relation of mutual nourishment between the living presence of the "artistic thing" and the human agencies surrounding it. While both maneuvers point to the active notion of criticism I outlined at the beginning of this article, it will be the second one from which *A Cultural Object*'s main emancipatory potential is derived.

If we consider the first task, it materializes through the questioning of the normative side of colonial and postcolonial institutionalism. *A Cultural Object* does not only introduce a "popular" subject into the museum, but it also makes its audience aware of what they can and cannot do and of what is and what is not allowed within museums and artistic spaces. Through experiencing the multisensorial itinerary of the labyrinth, our relationship with space primarily derives from a sense of entrapment. This sense is double: we are trapped within Scott's labyrinth, as much as the labyrinth itself is trapped within the museum walls. This claustrophobia illustrates the constraint of canonical appropriation of creativity and the institutionalization of critique. The boundaries of the museum (the physical as well as the ideological) become explicit as a totalizing, ravenous presence that even colonizes what remains outside its walls. But there is something repudiating that sensation. It is as if *the installation itself wanted to flee* from its locus. As we have seen, the installation not only serves as an "illustration" of the institution's power to consolidate a canon and impose a corpus of affects, but it also asks actively for alternative occupations of the institutional. *A Cultural Object* becomes then an excessive presence that materially, and not so much thematically, requires another spatial *Ordnung.* What are the coordinates of the spatial logic demanded by the installation? Could the dangerous, protracted, unlivable space that constitutes *A Cultural Object* become a space of refuge?

Through its uncanny, unruly formal configuration, *A Cultural Object* demands a different kind of behavior from the viewer. Besides being a constituent of Scott's project, what seemed destructive or appended in the institutional and artistic approaches to the installation in fact constitutes an alternately nurturing, entropic process. The continuous revisiting and altering of the installation becomes a material way of updating its presence among new audiences, thereby recomposing its curatorial currency. *A Cultural Object* generates a presence that refuses to disappear, a desiring entity that resists being captured within the logic of the institution and the monotony of the museum. But this entity does not only demand attention. In turn, the installation generates an intense and persistent space of freedom where nonnational interactions and new relations become possible.

*A Cultural Object* appears as a living entity that refuses to be integrated within normative postcolonial national institutionalism. Its unruly afterlife stands for a good example of the pervasiveness of the logic of escaping institutional and curatorial normativity. *A Cultural Object* provides a place of refuge in a context where surveillance and definition reign, generating unruly, nonnational communities of affect that imply new modes of imag(in)ing the institutional and conjuring up the transformative and unexpected potential of curating. Examined this way, the acts of vandalism criticized in the approaches to the installation which I have referenced could also be understood as a generative source that "renews" and resamples the bonds between artistic practice, art audiences, and institutional space.

## Conclusion

> When modern anthropology began to construct its other in terms of *topoi* implying distance, difference and opposition, its intent was above all, but at least also to construct ordered Space and Time—a cosmos—for Western society to inhabit rather than "understanding other cultures." (Fabian, 2014: 111–112)

Why resurrect *A Cultural Object?* Art's predicament has substantially changed from the time when Scott was asked to intervene at the National Gallery of Jamaica. The functioning of institutions, the conception of spectatorship, the grammar or exhibition making, and the role of the artist have been profoundly transformed. Furthermore, the debates that our installation seemed to respond to are long past: not because the domain of art has ceased being an open-for-all, democratized reality but because artistic representation is no longer seen as an effective way of changing things, either in the Caribbean or elsewhere. At first sight, from this perspective, the unruliness of *A Cultural Object* now seems to be swallowed and defused by the institution it belongs to. So, why should it be revisited? What lessons can *A Cultural Object* teach us?

In this article, I have attempted to confront this question by relating issues from the vantage point of curatorial practice, spectatorship, and affects and materiality. *A Cultural Object* reveals the complexity of curatorial displays. Traditionally, art criticism is largely concerned with exploring how Caribbean artists deal with representational constraints in the context of large-scale exhibitions (often commissioned from abroad) or biennials. However, museums are seen as ossified spaces of memory from which no real form of challenge can issue forth. Consequently, the negotiations taking place over several decades within permanent displays, such as the ones enacted by *A Cultural Object*, are frequently absent from critical panoramas. Many reasons render the challenge of this argument pressing. Among them I can mention the increasing complication of the institutional space, which is no longer recognizable in the classical forms of the art museum or exhibition space, the challenges to institutional regimes of visibility and cognoscibility posed within institutional space, in addition to the role of the digital in shaping transnational audiences and creative processes. Recovering the alternative and forgotten genealogy of these practices, and also the points at which they converge, would constitute a pressing agenda for Caribbean criticism and curatorial thinking.

Furthermore, we have seen how *A Cultural Object* can be understood as an example of an artist-configured exhibitional display. Scott's installation can, therefore, be viewed as an early case of artist-as-curator, one that is especially salient and original for its focus not only on which artworks are being displayed—and how and why—but also on the fissures and boundaries of the spatiotemporal institutional domain as well as on the consequences of introducing external realities into the museum space and vice versa. If we seriously consider these elements, as I have detailed in this article, then the matter will not be whether *A Cultural Object* was immediately captured, normalized, and incorporated by institutional logic. Instead, a whole new horizon emerges if we consider that the installation itself bears such a potential as to influence institutional practices, the contexts of spectatorship associated with these practices, and the possible strategies of dismantling and grounding shared cultural and political configurations. What we are left with, then—and as early as 1985!—is artistic practice that not merely opposes the institutional but which teaches and leads it. The important transformation in Caribbean exhibitional spaces announced by Scott's installation has had a long repercussion both in Jamaican art and on a regional level. Caribbean art is full of disturbing presences like Jimmy's.

My objective in this article has not been to simply categorize an installation created 30 years ago. Rather, I have tried to show how the then-crucial issues addressed by *A Cultural Object* were not self-evident or stable realities, and how they continue to pose

timely questions that resonate to this very day. Coinciding with Williams in defining criticism as a practical task, David Scott (1996) somehow sketches out the former's argument, pointing out that

> you cannot simply read off the error of a proposition without the prior labor of reconstructing the question to which it aims to respond. This is because propositions are never answers to self-evident or "perennial" questions […] and therefore you cannot assume in advance that you know the question in relation to which the text constitutes itself as an answer. (p. 6)

Scott is urging for strategic criticism, not only attentive to past and present experiences and failures in tackling its subject but also able to predict the current trajectory—and, therefore, the movements in the future—of that subject. In this text, I have argued that *A Cultural Object*'s aftermath is somehow presided over by these same movements. Dawn Scott's *A Cultural Object* stands at the same time for an attempt to exorcise these questions, a demonstration of their mutability, and a clairvoyant prediction of their itineraries in our present and in any possible future to come.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks to O'Neill Lawrence, Veerle Poupeye, and, above all, Nakazzi Hutchinson, Dawn Scott's daughter. Finally, the text benefitted from the conversations with Denisa Tomkova, Santi Pérez, and Bruno Henriques.

## Funding

This work was supported by a postdoctorate fellowship granted by the Portuguese Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT). The research developed here was produced over several long-term research stays in the Caribbean and the United States (National Gallery of Jamaica, University of the West Indies, Duke University; NYU Bobst Library).

## Notes

1. By garrison politics, I am referring here to a central phenomenon in contemporary Jamaican history having to do with the configuration of areas controlled by gang leaders more or less affiliated with political parties.
2. In this sense, the lack of a straightforwardly identifiable issue and the merging of politics with everyday problems have been pointed out as a common feature of the practice of this period, as evidenced in the work of artists such as Khalfani Ra or Omari Ra (see Poupeye, 2009b).
3. The term is used by Poupeye in her article published in 1985 on the *Six Options: Gallery Space Revisited* exhibition.
4. Out of the six installations that integrated *Six Options: Gallery Space Transformed*, only two are preserved and presently on display: Dawn Scott's *A Cultural Object* and David Boxer's *Headpiece—The Riefenstahl Requiem.*
5. An approximation to Jamaican and Caribbean art based on this idea of the vernacular can be found in Paul (1999, 2010).
6. It should be noted that *A Cultural Object* is part of an exercise organized by the institution itself. It was the National Gallery of Jamaica that commissioned and then approved Dawn Scott's intervention. If it had to stand only for the original agency originating it, it would be closer to a case of institutionalized critique than to one of institutional challenge. However, as I will

attempt to demonstrate, there is far more that is worthy of our attention concerning this project.

7. The exploration of nonhuman agencies has been a central task of recent—and not so recent—criticism and constitutes a worthwhile endeavor in exploring our relationship with institutional and artistic spaces (see Appadurai, 1986; Franke, 2010; Hodder, 2012; Latour, 1993).
8. Devon House was the first location of the National Gallery of Jamaica and a clearly "uptown" place.
9. Institutional practices have often remained outside of critical debates on contemporary Caribbean artistic practice. As for curatorial practices, Caribbean criticism has mostly focused on describing curatorial discourses and artworks displayed in temporary exhibitions, dismissing in many cases how these practices and discourses can configure more permanent displays in museums and art institutions.
10. Similar attempts have been made by Reesa Greenberg et al. (1996) and Maria Lind (2009). In the Caribbean, there has been an interesting effort (taking place concurrently in artistic, curatorial, and critical domains) to distance artistic practice from a restrictive understanding of it as equivalent to art exhibitions and museums (see, for example, Tancons, 2012).
11. A classical "orthodox" and nationalist view of this process can be found in Nettleford (1978).
12. "L'homme n'a pas d'instincts, il fait des institutions" (our translation).
13. La théorie de l'institution met le négatif hors du social (besoins), pour présenter la société comme essentiellement positive, inventive (moyens originaux de satisfaction). Une telle théorie nous donnera enfin des critères politiques: la tyrannie est un régime où il y a beaucoup de lois et peu d'institutions, la démocratie, un régime où il y a beaucoup d'institutions, très peu de lois. (our translation)
14. Some of these testimonies are condensed in the National Gallery of Jamaica blog, one of the few platforms of this kind coordinated by "official" Caribbean art institutions. This blog offers information on each initiative organized by the museum, in many cases recording audience responses to particular artworks and exhibitions. The articulation of more similar platforms and their use within art criticism would be essential if we aim to reconstruct a more nuanced view of artistic and curatorial processes.
15. This "our" aims to be as vague and undefined as possible. For curating is no longer associated with the exhibition space and the authorial voice of a trained figure functioning as curator. Different approaches to this question can be found in Balzer (2014) and Farquharson (2003).
16. Of course, in my analysis of this fragment, there is no iconoclastic claim of any sort. My objective, it is obvious, is not to defend any kind of vandalism. What I intend to do is to show how the afterlife of one single installation can be perceived in quite heterogeneous ways.
17. As part of this success, the installation was quoted and replicated in Ebony Patterson's contribution to the *Young Talents V* exhibition, held in 2010. *Cultural Soliloquy (Cultural Object Revisited)* was part of a broader project in which Patterson confronted several noteworthy artworks from the National Gallery of Jamaica collection.
18. On the "agency of things and objects" in museums, see Dudley (2010), Edwards et al. (2006), and Pearce (1994); I have dealt with this issue in relation to Caribbean installation art and institutional space in Garrido Castellano (2014, 2015a, 2015b).

## References

Appadurai A (ed.) (1986) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Archer-Straw P and Poupeye V (1995) *New World Imagery: Contemporary Jamaican Art*. London: South Bank Centre.

Baker Joseph K (2013) *Disturbers of the Peace: Representations of Madness in Anglophone Caribbean Literature*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press.
Balzer D (2014) *Curationism: How Curating Took over the Art World and Everything Else*. Toronto, ON, Canada: Coach House Books.
Boxer D and Poupeye V (1982) *Jamaican Art 1922–1982*. Kingston, Jamaica: National Gallery of Jamaica and Smithsonian Institute.
Boxer D and Poupeye V (1998) *Modern Jamaican Art*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.
Conrads D (ed.) (2000) *Soon Come: The Art of Contemporary Jamaica*. Omaha, NE: Nebraska Arts Council.
Deleuze G (2002) *L'île déserte et autres textes: Textes et entretiens 1953–1974*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
Douglas A (2004) Art history and art criticism in the Jamaican context. *Small Axe* 8(2): 49–60.
Dudley SH (ed.) (2010) *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*. London: Routledge.
Edwards E, Gosden C and Phillips R (eds) (2006) *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
Fabian J (2014) *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Farquharson A (2003) I curate, you curate, we curate. *Art Monthly* 269: 7–10.
Franke A (ed.) (2010) *Animism*. Antwerp: Sternberg Press.
Garrido Castellano C (2014) Conceptual Materialism. Installation Art and the Dismantling of Caribbean Historicism. *Third Text* 28(2): 149–162.
Garrido Castellano C (2015a) On Wanting Images and Shared Responsibilities. Belkis Ramírez´s De la misma madera. *Miradas-Elektronische Zeitschrift für Iberische und Ibero-amerikanische Kunstgeschichte* 2: 23–31.
Garrido Castellano C (2015b) On Truth and Opacity. Symbolic Translation and Legibility in Contemporary Text-Based Cuban Art. *Mitologías Hoy* 12: 223–236.
Greenberg R, Ferguson BR and Nairne S (eds) (1996) *Thinking about Exhibitions*. London: Routledge.
Hodder I (2012) *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relations between Humans and Things*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
Kempadoo R (2013) Gazing outward and looking back: configuring Caribbean visual culture. *Small Axe* 41: 136–153.
Latour B (1993) *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Lind M (2009) The curatorial. *Artforum* 68(2): 65–103.
Mitchell WJT (2005) *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Mohammed P (2011) *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
National Gallery of Jamaica (2010) In Memoriam: Dawn Scott (1951–2010). Available at: https://nationalgalleryofjamaica.wordpress.com/2010/09/21/in-memoriam-dawn-scott-1951-2010/
Nettleford R (1978) *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica*. Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica.
Paul A (1998) The curator's palette: legislating taste. *Small Axe* 2: 65–83.
Paul A (1999) Un-stalling the nation: the dilemma of contemporary Jamaican art. *Small Axe* 6: 57–78.
Paul A (2003a) Christopher cozier by Annie Paul. *Bomb Magazine 82*. Available at: http://bombmagazine.org/article/2524/
Paul A (2003b) The enigma of survival: traveling beyond the expat gaze. *Art Journal* 62(1): 48–65.

Paul A (2009) Do you remember the days of slav'ry? Connecting the present with the past in contemporary Jamaica. *Slavery & Abolition* 30(2): 169–178.
Paul A (2010) The turn of the native: vernacular creativity in the Caribbean. In: Raj Isar Y, Anheiler HK and Waterman C (eds) *Cultural Expression, Creativity and Innovation*. London: SAGE, 124–130.
Pearce S (ed.) (1994) *Interpreting Objects and Collections*. London: Routledge.
Poupeye V (1985) Six options: gallery space transformed. *Arts Jamaica* 4 (1–2): 2–8.
Poupeye V (1998) *Caribbean Art*. London: Thames & Hudson.
Poupeye V (2007) Intuitive art as canon. *Small Axe* 24: 73–82.
Poupeye V (2009a) Dawn Scott's a cultural object. In: *National Gallery of Jamaica Blog*. Available at: https://nationalgalleryofjamaica.wordpress.com/2009/12/07/dawn-scotts-a-cultural-object/
Poupeye V (2009b) What times are these? Visual art and social crisis in postcolonial Jamaica. *Small Axe* 29: 164–184.
Scott D (1996) *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Smith T (2012) *Thinking Contemporary Curating*. New York: Independent Curators International.
Stephens M (2013) What is an island? Caribbean studies and the contemporary visual artist. *Small Axe* 41: 8–26.
Steyerl H (2010) A thing like you and me. *e-flux*, 20 May–15 August. Available at: http://www.e-flux.com/journal/a-thing-like-you-and-me/#_ftnref11
Tancons C (2012) Curating carnival? In: Bailey D, Cummins A, Lapp A, et al. (eds) *Curating in the Caribbean*. Berlin: The Green Box, 37–63.
Thompson K (2006) *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Picturesque*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Wainwright L (2011) *Timed Out: Art and the Transnational Caribbean*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Wainwright L (2012) Varieties of belatedness and provincialism: decolonization and British pop. *Art History* 35(2): 442–461.
Wainwright L (2013) Americocentrism and art of the Caribbean: contours of a time-space logic. *Journal of American Studies* 47(2): 417–438.
Williams R (1983) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Author biography

Carlos Garrido Castellano works at the Center for Comparative Studies of Lisbon University. His research interests focus on Caribbean visual culture, critical theory, and collaborative artistic practices. He has done long-term fieldwork research in Jamaica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Trinidad and Tobago, Puerto Rico, and the United States. He is author of two books on Caribbean art and curatorial politics. Currently he coordinates the research project "Comparing We's: Collectivism, Emancipation, Postcoloniality."